CAMPAIGN OF GEN. LYON IN MISSOURI;

ITS VALUE TO THE UNION CAUSE.

A PAPER

READ BEFORE THE OREGON COMMANDERY

OF THE

MILITARY ORDER

OF THE

LOYAL LEGION OF THE UNITED STATES,

NOVEMBER 7, 1894,

BY COMPANION

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Companions:

A period of 33½ years, the average duration of human life, has passed since the guns trained on Ft. Sumpter—summoned the Nation to the defense of its existence.

A whole generation has come and gone, but of that Grand Army who answered their country's summons, more than half a million remain to answer to the roll-call of honor; their heads silvered over with age; their bodies bent with weight of years, but still with hearts as stout and true as when they first listened to the beating of the long roll, and the bugles call to arms.

It is pleasant to know and feel that the passing years have not dimmed the memory, nor loosened the ties of comrade and companionship which were formed on those campaign marches and bloody battle fields.

To go back over the scenes of that troublous time, recounting the experiences through which we passed, is now to us but a pleasant reminiscence.

Like some tired traveller who having climbed to the summit of a long divide, looks back to the weary, dusty road across the plains over which he has come; heaves a sigh of relief, recounts its incidents around the evening camp-fire, and on the morrow, staff in hand, sets his face resolutely toward the western slope which leads to his final destination, so we, Companions, gather here to spend an hour in talking of the past, to go on *our* way to-morrow, measuring out day by day the remainder of our earthly journey.

So much has been written about the war; its incidents so fully gathered up for the information of the present and of future generations, that it seems almost a useless task to try to bring out anything new or startling at this late day.

I at least shall not attempt it. But as those things which one has seen and felt have always more or less of interest in the telling, what I shall say in this paper will relate mostly to events in which my personal experience was involved, including the campaign ending with the

battle of Wilson's Creek, the death of Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, with a sketch of his character as I knew him, and his services to the Union cause, together with other incidents connected with my own regiment, and the beginnings of the war—for it really began on the plains of Kansas four years before it burst out in fury over all the land.

That war has been properly called the Slaveholder's Rebellion. Although started under the guise of "State Rights," that was only a dogma invented to quiet the consciences of its leaders, and as a catchword for their ignorant followers, which during the first year of strife was brushed away, to be succeeded by a military despotism such as few people ever groaned under.

One after another the plans used to maintain the supremacy in the U. S. Senate of the slave power and thus to dominate the Nation had failed.

Texas was admitted, with a proviso, to divide into three or five states all to secure additional members in the Senate.

The cry of $54\frac{40}{}$ or fight was hushed, after using it to gain a presidential campaign, and the splendid territory of British Columbia, north of us, was handed over to Great Britain, as being of slave occupation, impossible.

The war with Mexico, which Texas cost us, adding to our domain on the south, New Mexico, Arizona and California, all seemed to the slave power full of splendid possibilities. Then came the cry of gold, filling California with a population inimical to slavery.

Once more the question had to be answered. How shall we perpetuate our power, and the only way seemed to be to establish a new cordon of territory, behind which slavery could intrench itself forever against the growing numbers and awakened conscience of the free states.

So brushing aside all former compromises, solemnly made for the sake of peace and quiet, the Kansas-Nebraska bill was forced upon the people and freemen were ordered by Congress to be catchers of slaves throughout the length and breadth of the land.

We all remember how at last the Lion of Liberty was aroused, and would not down, until the final defeat and disarming of this rebellious Slave Power.

In laying out the new territories care was taken to

extend their limits to the summit of the Rocky Mountains so their flank could not be turned by free settlements on the West. Kansas therefore included the states of Kansas and Colorado as now constituted. The whole was dedicated to slavery by these self-appointed dictators of human destiny.

Well says the proverb: "Man proposes, God disposes."

Forth went the rallying cry. The hosts of Freedom gathered from North, East, West and even South; settled on those beautiful prairies, and spite of hunger and cold, of want of shelter and all the comforts of life, of a hostile administration, and hordes of border ruffians they held the land for Freedom.

The last expiring act of Buchanan's feeble administration was to admit Kansas as a free state.

Thus we stood after four years of difficulties such as few can now realize. The great-hearted Lincoln who had visited and encouraged us the previous year was now elected president. Missouri, in spite of its executive, and the cabal at Montgomery, had voted in convention to stay by the Union. We felt safe in taking a breathing spell for arranging our domestic and civil affairs, preparing to occupy the land with industrious citizens, school houses, churches, public buildings and all the improvements needed by a free and enlightened community.

Then in the midst, like a bomb, came the news that Fort Sumpter was fired on. Nobody in the United States understood better than the people of Kansas what was the significance of that bombardment.

I was then holding an appointment from a leading denomination, to organize churches and lay the foundations of moral and educational institutions, without which no people ever yet has prospered.

The next morning I sent in my resignation, and started in to help organize the second regiment of Kansas Volunteer Infantry, under the first call for three months.

Already the First was under way at Leavenworth and ours next at Lawrence. The latter was composed mostly of young men, the flower of the state.

Our organization and muster was not yet complete

when the exigencies of the service called us to Kansas City to meet Price whom Gen. Lyon was driving west from St. Louis. That first days work for Uncle Sam was a march of 35 miles made without a murmur the boys being at home in camp next day like veterans and such indeed they were, with their four years experience in making Kansas a free state.

Price retreating to the southwest before Gen. Lyon, after completing our organization and muster in, we moved with the First Kansas and some regulars to join Lyon at Springfield. There was little rest from that time to the end of the campaign. It was a time indeed of action for the men and anxiety for the leaders.

Our little army of about 5000, far from its base of support, was threatened by an advancing foe of more than four times its number.

Springfield could not be covered by so small a force, being open to approach and attack from all sides.

Scout after scout was sent back by Gen. Lyon to learn if at least one or two regiments would not be able to reach us from Rolla 120 miles away, but our nearest railroad communication. Meanwhile we were constantly engaged in seeking the whereabouts of the enemy.

For this purpose on July 20, the 1st Iowa and 2nd Kansas and a few regulars under Capt. Sweeney made a forced march of 45 miles to Forsythe on the White river, on the south line of the state, where one of the hostile forces was gathering. We made the trip in fifty hours being 28 miles the second day, double quicking it the last four miles, finding the enemy intrenched in a brick court house in centre of the public square, whence they expected to pepper us as we entered the town.

A shell from a small howitzer sent them swarming up the hills and across the river. Our boys never halted until the last of the fleeing rebels was out of gunshot. This was the first time we ever smelt the enemy's powder. It was about 6 p. m. They had supper just cooked, but rather than it should be wasted we kindly ate it for them. I tried hard to get a big dutchman to drop a coffee pot full of coffee, suggesting poison and other dangers but he only gave a grunt and held on to the spout until it was empty.

I visited the court house next morning and found the shells had scattered a whole library of law books thus confirming the old latin maxim: "Inter arma Lex Silentia." We cut down their flag pole, threw the pigs of lead we found into the public well, where I suppose they remain to this day, clothed and shod our barefooted men with what stores we could find, and retired to Springfield before a force could be gathered to intercept us.

Then came the expedition to Dug Spring on Aug. 1st, with the whole army. This was on the main road to Arkansas, and the route by which we expected the main body of the enemy.

We found their advance 24 miles from Springfield, chased and shelled them over two ranges of mountains, when it was thought best not to leave our rear uncovered by going further away from our base.

The skirmish of Dug Springs was memorable for the manner we handled the enemies cavalry. We were on the side of a mountain near the summit where, concealed by bushes, we could overlook the whole valley and Rains headquarters at the foot of the opposite mountain, some three miles away.

Our batteries were quickly placed on a spur overlooking the road while the rebel cavalry 1000 strong came gaily along looking for us until within a hundred yards—when they found us. A shell dropped in front of them and as they turned tail, shell after shell dropped carefully in their midst made a stampede which was kept up until they were out of range. So the infantry were spectators for once and were not called on to hurry the cattle.

Next day our regiment being sent ahead as skirmishers got abreast of Rains headquarters and in fifteen minutes more would have captured him had not the artillery in the rear spoke too soon, alarming the enemy and enabling him to escape.

The main army halted here at the foot of the mountain, while we went on over to the next valley, a place called McCulla's Farm. There was a good spring, farm house, and nobody at home. I remembered the place, having received a counterfeit half dollar there in change

a few years before while stopping over night. The oats were gathered so I told the boys they might take half a dollars worth to feed the horses, which they did and if any were left, the rebels undoubtedly got them, but I never heard of them getting any there afterwards.

We sat on the porch two or three hours watching the southern road and picking up stray rebels. One old man came along on horseback, shot gun on shoulder a bag of biscuits and bacon for saddle bags, and wanted to know where the army was as he had two boys in it. We asked him which army. He answered "Gineral Price's." We asked him to alight passed his biscuits and bacon around for lunch, borrowed his shot gun and then the old man found out where the army was.

We were dangerously near, only six miles from the main body of the enemy and next came a scout of their cavalry looking for *us*. We saw their dust down the road and immediately made dispositions to have them call in and stay with us also, but coming within one hundred yards of the house their suspicions were aroused and away they went like the wind. A rumor went over the mountain that we were captured and Gen. Lyon sent an aid in hot haste, scolding us for venturing so far and ordering us back, but found us taking matters so comfortably that he modified the order for us not to stay out after sundown. So hitching up a little donkey to a goat cart we had found, we put into it some women who had been hiding out and came in asking our protection. We escorted them over the mountain, receiving as we filed past, the applause of the whole army, at our queer cavalcade. Returning to Springfield next day to prevent our rear being cut off by the enemy, advancing on other roads, matters began to look serious indeed.

The enemy more than four times our number, was within 30 miles of us.

The disaster at Bull Run had paralyzed the authorities at Washington. In vain did we look for the needed reinforcements. At last a council of war was held. The necessity of retiring was too plain for argument. The next question was, is it safer to retire without a fight or to engage and cripple the enemy first. It was a

forlorn hope but like brave and true men they decided to fight the enemy first and retire afterwards if necessary.

So it was arranged to go out and meet them, and on the eve of Aug. 9th, our little army marched out to what was considered a desperate chance by those who led it.

By a strange coincidence the enemy had arranged to surprise *us* on the same night but were deterred by a light shower of rain. I have oftened wondered what would have been the result if those two armies had met half way at the midnight hour. Experienced troops of course would have recoiled and waited for daylight, but these were forces only too eager to meet each other, brave and unflinching, and they undoubtedly would have attacked regardless of consequences. As it was, the enemy stayed in camp and we marched until past midnight to a point just outside of their pickets and bivouacked by the roadside until day light.

The first streak of gray in the east reminded me that it was time to move but headquarters was silent. It was rumored afterwards that Gen. Lyon's watch stopped and so a delay until sunrise lost us the chance for a surprise of the enemy.

As it was however we hastened on the double quick drove them from their position about 6 a. m., and held it until the battle was over.

Just before we got to the field I asked Gen. Lyon, as a favor, not to make a mere target of my regiment. I said you can depend upon them general in any position you put them, only give them a chance to do something and they will not disappoint you.

Of course he could not promise but I believe in consequence of this suggestion he placed them at first in reserve as the only regiment he could spare to cover any disaster that might happen.

Thus for nearly an hour we sat some 50 yards in rear of the line of battle. The enemy getting our range with a gun across the valley kept throwing shells which passed over our heads, exploding some 30 yards in the rear, each one making us interested as to where the next might drop, until Captain Totten of our battery just in front of us jumped down from his horse, said a

big round word, ordered in a solid shot, sighted the gun himself and heels over head went that hostile cannon to trouble us no more.

Just then some sharp shooters got the drop on Major McCloud and myself as we sat on our horses at the left of the regiment, and as the minnie balls went by with their zip zip, I remarked that *they* were worse than shells, but the Major who had been through the Mexican war, did not seem to mind them at all.

Then came another diversion. The enemy who were trying all the time to out-flank us with their superior numbers, sent a whole regiment of cavalry to envelope us on the right.

There was no time to hesitate. Company I with their rifles were ordered to deploy as skirmishers 50 feet apart, and away they went through the scattered timber, driving the cavalry back to their own lines.

All this while, some three hours, the battle was raging furiously in front when the whisper came to a few of us that Gen. Lyon was killed. I was ordered by my colonel to the rear to hasten up an ambulance.

There was a short lull in the firing just then, the enemy withdrawing to prepare for their final assault.

It was then the 1st and 2nd Kansas, with some regulars were ordered to the front, forming a line of about 600 men to withstand this final assault of our adversaries.

Before my return they had passed over the ridge and lay behind a low knoll, each man having to shove his musket back on the ground to load, for in that last assault a hand could not be exposed without being shot off and ninety of our brave boys were killed or wounded, all in the head or shoulders.

I had just got to the ridge when the enemy began to sweep it with grape and cannister, rendering it impossible to cross, and I stood there shedding tears at the thought that my brave boys would be annihilated for the firing was so wicked that one could not distinguish between volleys.

But it did not last long. Within 40 feet those three rebel regiments came with a courage worthy of a better cause.

The colonels of both the Kansas regiments were already desperately wounded and our Lieut.-Col. Blair, a Mexican veteran, had just cooly given the order to fix bayonets, prepare to charge when the enemy retired and I have been told since the war, by those engaged on the other side, that one of those regiments could muster only 40 men after the assault.

Thus ended this bloody and fiercely contested battle.

The battle of Springfield was a drawn battle. Not a shot fired after the last assault nor a step taken in pursuit by either side.

Major Sturgis who assumed command after Lyon's death had given orders to retire as soon as it was safe. Our boys did not think it safe until the enemy retired.

I saw them burning their camp equipage and preparing to retreat and have learned since the war from their own lips that some of them got twenty miles from the battle field before they found out they did not have to run.

As for us, the last man of our reserve had been called into action and our ammunition was exhausted. To hold the country with our small force was impossible, so retiring slowly and orderly to Springfield, we spent the night placing our badly wounded in a hospital. McCollough, under a flag of truce, said he did not want to fight us any more, but wanted us to retire from Springfield which of course was our plan before the battle.

So the next morning at sunrise our long train of five miles, containing the moneys of the banks and other valuables of the region which the union people wished to take away, some $1,500,000 in value, set out on the weary march to Rolla 120 miles away, the enemy being too badly punished to follow us.

There were few of even the comforts of camp life in this campaign. The most we could do for our men was to get them a blue blouse to distinguish them from the enemy. I made it with a buffalo robe for a tent. When we got back to St. Louis, Fremont made some new regiment turn over its camp equipage to us, and then we fought our way over the Hannibal & St. Joe

R. R. across the State of Missouri to Leavenworth, having a final volley at the rebels at Weston where they were in ambush for us six miles from our destination. In our short term of four and one half months service, we had marched 800 miles. Our regimental flag full of bullet holes with its staff half shot away is furled in the state house at Topeka, a war relic of which we are not ashamed.

The question remains: What did we accomplish? Simply this. After the battle of Wilson's Creek, Kansas was safe and St. Louis, the objective point of the rebels in the west, was no longer in their reach. All the movements made afterwards to that end were desultory and futile. The preparations so long made by them to forestall the friends of the Union were dissipated and from that time on it was for the rebels in the west a losing fight until they were driven east of the Mississippi to be finally defeated by Sherman and Grant.

To return to our commander, Gen. Nathaniel Lyon, a brief sketch as I knew him is all that I shall attempt:

Of medium stature and weight, very much of the size of Gen. Grant at that time, he was of the same indomitable nature. Of nervous temperament like Sherman he possessed all the requisites of successful generalship, except that imperturbable coolness which distinguished the silent man who afterwards rose to the head of our armies. He knew not fear. Like Grant he only wanted to know the whereabouts of the enemy; not waiting on their motions, but always keeping them busy in watching his, or in getting out of his way. Had he lived he would undoubtedly have risen to high command. He was too strict a disciplinarian to be popular with the rank and file, but he was no martinet and he commanded that highest praise of a general, the confidence of all under him. One of his men who was with him in the Indian war told me that once in reconnoitering with six of his company, he peeped over the brow of a hill to find some hundred redskins on the other side. Instead of retreating he gave the order to fix bayonets and charge and the Indians supposing there must be more soldiers behind, made a precipitate retreat themselves. Above all there beat in his bosom the heart of a true patriot.

As a man could not raise his hand against the mother that bore him, so no more could he have raised his against his country, which in a sense is a mother to us all.

Providentially placed in charge of the important arsenal at St. Louis, holding as yet only the rank of Captain in the regular army, he saw through the designs of the rebel crew, who, under pretence of state exercises of militia, formed a camp in the out-skirts of the city. While they were temporizing with and hoodwinking Gen. Harney in command of the department, he quietly prepared to defeat their purposes. The arsenal in his charge was the only one in all the Southern States that did not fall into the hands of the rebels.

He not only fortified the arsenal, but got a secret requisition from the Governor of Illinois for ten thousand stand of arms to have them removed to a place of safety.

The steamboat to load them was brought in after dark and at midnight when all was ready and the captain reported for orders, the answer was "Straight to Alton by the channel of the river," and so, under guard, to see that officers and crew did their duty past the rebellious city during the silent hours of the night, the precious cargo was taken safely to its destination.

Then Harney being removed, without delay he mustered the loyal element of the city, and finding out that cannons and arms stolen from the arsenal at Baton Rouge were being secretly conveyed into the hostile camp, he did not hesitate to march out and compel their surrender, thus defeating all their plans for holding the city and capturing the arsenal.

Hastily arranging affairs so as to leave the city, he pursued the rebel Governor Jackson and his party so close that they had to burn the railroad bridge over the Gasconade to get out of his way. But he did not wait to build bridges. With steamboats he chased them to Jefferson City, thence to Boonville, 200 miles from St. Louis, where they made a stand with double his force, only to be routed again, and so he kept them moving until they were beyond the limits of he state, giving no

chance for treason to make head within its borders. In all this he exhibited the qualities of high statemanship as well as military genius. Had he been of the slow and wavering kind—had he not been prompted by the loftiest patriotism, Missouri with its great city of St. Louis, rich in resources and the center of a vast influence, would certainly have been enveloped by the rebellion, making the final success of the union armies, to say the least, problematical. With clear vision he saw what to do, and with prompt decision he acted. He had a right to expect that the friends of the union in his rear would come to his aid, so he neither hesitated nor waited, but urged on the march against the fleeing enemy, until gathered with his little army at Springfield he saw that huge host coming to overwhelm him. Who shall say what were his feelings as again and again he begged for even a regiment or two, and was denied even that support. Between the 4th and 10th of August, a scout was sent 100 miles towards Rolla to see if they were coming only to find that no help was at hand. He then knew we must retire, a thought most repugnant to his nature, which was finally compromised by our going to meet the enemy at Wilson's Creek and he to meet a soldiers death.

His career so short yet so full of action and true glory was obscured by the greater events which followed so rapidly in the wake of the mighty armies we gathered, and the bloody battles we fought to suppress the wicked slaveholders rebellion.

In the city of St. Louis a marble shaft in a public square near the arsenal, commemorates his memory, and every year his surviving comrades of that campaign, meet there to do him honor.

His fame will grow in the coming years, as the future historian scans the heroes of the war and weighs the value of their deeds.

To us who acted a minor part in the great drama of the war there remains at least the satisfaction of duty performed and the assurance that in the final summoning up, nothing that is of value of reputation or character, will be lost.